



With stunning views of mountains in three states, the Sassafras Mountain Observation Tower is a destination that South Carolina residents and visitors will want to visit again and again, (SCDNR photo by Danielle Kent)

Sassafras Mountain Tower opens on South Carolina's highest point

Conservation partnership produced landmark of which all can be proud

By Greg Lucas

The long-awaited observation tower on Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest point at 3,553 feet above sea level, officially opened to the public on April 22, 2019, Earth Day.

"The highest point in the state is a geographical landmark that every South Carolinian, young and old, should have the opportunity to see and enjoy," said Alvin Taylor, recently retired director of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). "We hope that the observation tower will be a place where residents and visitors can go to marvel at the view of three states and the Blue Ridge Mountains and to appreciate what a beautiful and diverse place South Carolina truly is."

To reach the Sassafras Tower (in northern Pickens County): from the town of Pickens, go 15.8 miles north on US 178 to Rocky Bottom. Turn right on F. Van Clayton Memorial Highway and go 4.7 miles to the end of the road. The gravel parking area is on the left.

The Sassafras Tower, designed by Pickens architect Gil Stewart, has a natural stone appearance and sits on the South Carolina/North Carolina line. A compass rose etched into the tower shows the state line as it runs through the structure. The tower sits 11 feet above the mountain's highest point, and the top of the tower is 44 feet in diameter.

A mobility-impaired trail and ramp, along with a paved road that travels to the top, allows access for people of all abilities, and bathrooms are in place beside the parking lot.

On a clear day from the top of the tower, a visitor

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A compass rose decorates the Sassafra Mountain Tower and helps mark the line between South Carolina and North Carolina. (SCDNR photo by Danielle Kent)

New tower offers breathtaking views

Continued from page 1

can see 30-50 miles into the states of South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia.

In Fall 2010, a group of interested organizations gathered at the Pickens County Museum to discuss the possibility of constructing an observation tower on top of Sassafra Mountain. At that time, the highest point in South Carolina was difficult to find, the road was not good, and so many trees were on the summit that there was barely a view, except in winter. Those conditions on top of the mountain have now changed dramatically with the completion of the Sassafra Tower.

Construction on the \$1.1 million Sassafra Mountain observation tower began in November 2017 by Lazer Construction of Anderson, the general contractor for the project. Funding for the observation tower atop Sassafra Mountain came from a variety of sources, including Duke Energy, the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund, Pickens County, Felburn Foundation, S.C. Heritage Trust and from hundreds of private supporters through commemorative brick sales.

Poised on the South Carolina and North Carolina border, Sassafra Mountain is about 20 miles north of Pickens. It sits on the Eastern Continental Divide, is the tri-point of three distinct watersheds, and is home to the Foothills Trail, a 77-mile footpath between Table Rock and Oconee state parks. The Palmetto Trail, which will one day link the South Carolina mountains to the sea in

a continuous trail of 500 miles, is also on the flanks of Sassafra Mountain.

Sassafra Mountain is part of the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges and the Franklin L. Gravelly Wildlife Management Area, managed by SCDNR. Sassafra Mountain is listed as a tourist destination by Pickens County. For more information on Sassafra Mountain regulations, visit <https://www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/ManagedLand/ManagedLand/53>.



Numerous dignitaries were on hand April 22 for the ribbon-cutting marking the public opening of the Sassafra Mountain Observation Tower. (SCDNR photo by Taylor Main)

Chastain honored with Extraordinary Achievement Award from Upstate Forever

‘Modern Day Daniel Boone’ lauded for four decades of dedication, leadership

Dennis Chastain was honored with the Extraordinary Achievement Award at the 2019 ForeverGreen Awards Luncheon, sponsored by Upstate Forever. The award recognizes Chastain for his more-than 40 years of work as a writer, historian, botanist, guide, and conservation advocate.

The Extraordinary Achievement Award recognizes an individual who, through dedication and leadership, has made an extraordinary contribution to conservation and/or sustainable growth in the Upstate.

Chastain is an award-winning outdoor writer, historian, tour guide and interpretive naturalist. Once described by The Greenville News as a “modern day Daniel Boone,” he has spent most of his adult life exploring, photographing, and writing about the South Carolina mountains.

Along the way he has made a number of important discoveries, including wildflowers never recorded in Pickens County, the remnants of long-forgotten roads and Native American trails, and numerous prehistoric rock carvings on Pinnacle and Table Rock mountains that he and archaeologist Tommy Charles first documented.

Each spring, Dennis leads popular tours in the Nine Times area to view rare mountain plants. He has conducted several members-only field trips for Upstate Forever through the years and has conducted classes for Clemson University’s Master Naturalist program and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute program.

Dennis currently serves as the Blue Wall Vice-President of the Pickens County Historical Society and



Dennis Chastain, seen here at an OLLI Jocassee Gorges class, was honored with the Extraordinary Achievement Award at the 2019 ForeverGreen Awards Luncheon, sponsored by Upstate Forever. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)

is working to secure funding for a historically accurate reconstruction of the Colonial era Fort Prince George. Dennis and his wife, Jane, live on his family’s homeplace in the shadow of Table Rock where his ancestors have been deeply rooted since 1796. ❄️

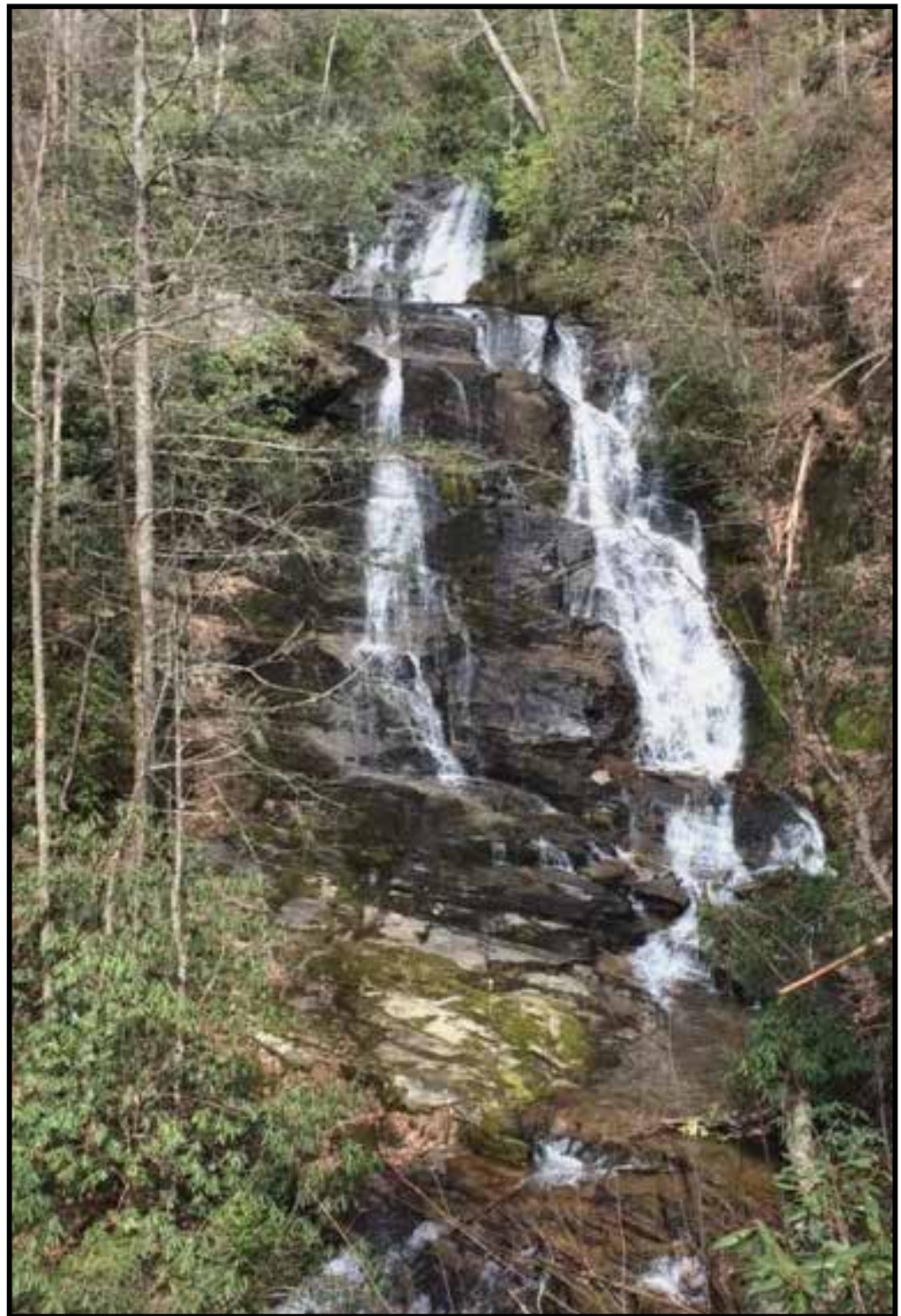
Beech Bottom Falls Trail is now open

Jocassee manager solved land puzzle and 150-foot waterfalls is now a showcase

Fifty square miles is a lot of land to work with, and that's just about the size of the Jocassee Gorges. Big properties have big, and often complicated, property boundaries. Jocassee has more than 75 miles of property lines. When Jocassee Gorges was acquired in 1998, few property lines had been formally surveyed and marked. Such a task is difficult, especially in extremely rough terrain with deep ravines, scattered streams, waterfalls, and all the land forms associated with rugged mountain territory.

One particularly remote site had perplexed Jocassee Gorges Project Manager Mark Hall for several years. Along the boundary of Jocassee was an impressive waterfall, more than 150 feet in height. Hall had been told that the waterfall was either in private ownership or within a strip of land reserved by Duke Energy for a possible future transmission line. Hall is a Registered Forester trained in all aspects of forest management, including property line survey and identification. One day he was in the waterfall area marking property lines, and things simply were not adding up with certain segments of the boundary. He hired a professional surveyor to solve the dilemma, and lo and behold, the waterfall was totally within the boundaries of the state-owned Jocassee Gorges. What a find! He immediately began plans to make the waterfall accessible to the public.

Hall hired professional trail designer, Walter Cook, to find a route. Cook is a retired, forest engineering professor from the University of Georgia. After many months of painstaking traverses across the landscape, a plan was developed. The project was so difficult, many trail builders



Beech Bottom Falls is now accessible through a new trail located off F. Van Clayton Memorial Highway, on the way to Sassafras Mountain, in northern Pickens County. (SCDNR photo by Mark Hall)

declined to even submit bids on the project. However, Southern Taproot LLC of Walhalla submitted a successful bid and built the trail in the summer of 2018. Bill Noel and Britt Singer of Southern Taproot hand-carved more than 2,000 feet of trail to the overlook.

T&T Construction of Lexington followed up and built an observation platform. It was quite an ordeal, working on bedrock, and required hauling

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Environmental classes offered at Holly Springs Center

In December 2018, Dr. Danny Merck, superintendent of School District of Pickens County (SDPC), asked Abby Baker, director of Holly Springs Center, and Betty McDaniel if they would partner with SDPC and offer environmental education classes to fifth graders throughout the District.

Merck had been offered a large sum of money to help with these classes. All elementary schools in Pickens County were offered to send their fifth graders at a greatly reduced rate. The schools would take an all-day field trip to Holly Springs Center during the winter/spring of 2019. Each child would be able to take at least one environmental class during the trip as well as other offerings in the Center's School of Mountain Arts. Some of the favorite environmental classes have been:

Haynes); "All You Need is a Tree" (Tricia Kyzer from Jocassee Wild); "Mini-Environments" (Allen Stephenson); and "S.C. Snakes and other Creatures" (Greg Lucas from SCDNR). These classes were all in line with South Carolina State Standards and proved to be interesting and fun for Pickens County students. Twelve elementary schools have taken advantage of this special opportunity. Thanks were expressed to the donor of the money, to Pickens County, and to SDPC for giving students this opportunity.

Appreciation was also expressed to instructors of the classes and staff, especially Pauline Blackston, at Holly Springs Center.

Adults may also sign up for classes in the Holly Springs Center's School of Mountain Arts by going to its webpage at hollyspringscenter.com or by calling (864) 878-9335. ❄️



Fifth-grade students participate in an environmental education class at Holly Springs Center in Pickens County. Twelve schools took part in these special classes, which also included offerings in the Center's School of Mountain Arts.

Impressive waterfalls at end of new trail

Continued from page 4

about three tons of materials in by hand. The entire trail is about 3,500 feet long and takes about one and a half hours to go in and return. The initial section follows the Abner Creek Road, then forks to meander the contours above Abner Creek and ends at the overlook platform. Hiking difficulty is about moderate.

The project was partially funded by the State Trails Program, administered by the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. Heyward Douglass and other members of the Foothills Trail Conservancy assisted with vegetation management at the overlook by removing trees blocking the view of the falls.

The project was also supported by the Friends of Jocassee, Clemson University's Youth Learning Institute, and Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative. ❄️

Directions to Beech Bottom Falls: From the intersection of Highways 11 and 178 in northern Pickens County, head north on Highway 178 about 7 miles, then turn right on F. Van Clayton Memorial Highway at Rocky Bottom. (Sign also here for Sassafras Mountain.) Go about 2 miles to Chimneytop Gap and park in the gravel parking lot on the left where signage points the way to both the Foothills Trail and Beech Bottom Falls Trail.

Camp McCall to

Baptist camp for boys has been helping to raise up the next generation of S.C. young men for six decades

If you have ever driven the windy switchbacks of Highway 178 between (the remains of) Bob's Place and Rocky Bottom, you may have noticed the large ballfield and lovely lake through the trees. You may have even, like many people, stopped on the road to get a glimpse at the beautiful chapel sitting high on the hill. And like many people, you may have wondered, "What is that place?"

That place would be Camp McCall, the Baptist Camp for boys since 1960. Owned and operated by the South Carolina Baptist Convention, Camp McCall is a residential summer camp for boys that has been helping to raise up the next generation of South Carolina young men for six decades.

In the 1940s and 50, the Baptists split the summer between boys and girls camps at Camp Rawles, a single facility in Wagener, S.C. As each program grew, the need for a dedicated facility became more apparent, and in 1958, the Roy C. McCall family donated the original 120 acres in Pickens County. Over the years, the property has grown to its current 322 acres, with most of the property being adjacent to South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) land. Between SCDNR land and property owned by North Carolina parks and game lands, Camp McCall finds itself in the middle of roughly 50,000 protected acres. This setting, in addition to being located in a spot that gets no cell phone coverage, creates a feeling of remoteness and disconnectedness that helps campers



Camp McCall is a residential summer camp in northern Pickens County, owned and operated by the South Carolina Baptist Convention.



This summer, Camp McCall will be hosting a 60th Anniversary Celebration on Saturday, July 27.

unplug and get away from the distractions of the world.

In 1960, the camp staff totaled 19 employees. Currently, Camp McCall has four full-time employees and more than 50 seasonal staff, including 40 college-aged males who conduct the program. The program staff, which has always been the heart of McCall, have the responsibility of spending the week with campers, creating a safe environment that fosters growth and development while also providing a tremendous role-model of a Christian young

"I do not know what it is about McCall. The time spent in the mountains and the deep bottoms enhance the meaning of the place. Yet, Camp is not just a place as it is a state of mind. It is a wonderful people. McCall is where I saw God's love. God's truth was transferred. I could understand."

David Barrett, in "Re

celebrate 60 years



County owned and operated by the South Carolina Baptist

*It is that is so special
the uniqueness of the
park, damp creek
mystical aura of the
not so much a place
and a group of
Camp McCall was a place
incarnated, where
translated into a language*

Reflections on McCall

outside is good; 3) Camp is preparation for life; and

man. The vast majority of staffers attended Camp McCall as campers while they were growing up, and at least seven of the current staff had fathers who also worked on staff many years ago. This helps create an emotional bond that makes the program, and everything attached to it, more significant and life-changing.

Camp McCall has four Core Beliefs that guide their program and these beliefs are found throughout everything that happens at McCall. These beliefs are: 1) Everyone needs to experience God; 2) Being

4) Everyone, especially men, need accountability, adventure and adversity in life.

Camp McCall currently offers several different summer programs, including “Crusader” Camp, the week-long (Monday-Friday) program that has been Camp’s mainstay for 60 years. Other camps include shorter Father/Son programs and “Adventure Recreation” trip camps, where high school campers venture beyond camp property for a week of backpacking, rock climbing, kayaking and other adventure-based activities. Campers stay in age/grade specific cabins and participate from a wide range of traditional sports, hiking, water sports (in that beautiful lake visible from the road), ropes courses and archery, just to name a few.

Over the past 10 years, Camp McCall has also opened up the facility for external groups in the spring and fall. Church groups, college/university students, leadership teams and others have found the rustic atmosphere of Camp McCall is a perfect place to escape and accomplish their retreat goals.

The legacy of Camp McCall now includes more than 133,000 campers, with 26,000 of those identifying that some kind of significant faith-based decision made while at Camp.

This summer, Camp McCall will be hosting a 60th Anniversary Celebration on Saturday, July 27. Former campers, parents, staffers and others associated with McCall in the past are invited to attend this special day. For more information about Camp McCall or the 60th Anniversary Celebration, visit its website (campmccall.org) or contact the office at (864) 878-6025. 🌿



Between SCDNR land and property owned by North Carolina parks and game lands, Camp McCall finds itself in the middle of roughly 50,000 protected acres.



Landslides in the Jocassee Gorges were caused by massive amounts of rainfall and have forced the closing of some roads. (SCDNR photo by Tom Swaynham)

Landslides plague Jocassee

Some roads may not open until repairs are completed in Fall 2019

Winter 2018 and Spring 2019 were unusually wet in the mountains. Soils became over-saturated and small springs popped up in places that have been historically dry. As a result, Jocassee has experienced five landslides where Jocassee Project Manager Mark Hall estimated that from 50 to 400 tons of soil have given way on each of the different sites.

“This has been a real slap in the face,” Hall said. “We have the most dedicated and competent crew of technicians we’ve ever had on Jocassee, and they work hard to protect soil and water quality.”

Hall studied the landslide sites and concluded that the land faults were not the result of poor road engineering, but due to the high levels of saturation in the earth. The roads on Jocassee have been re-graded and stabilized with hydro-seeding added in critical areas over the past 18 months. However from December 2018 to April 2019, deep soil saturation caused

numerous portions of the highly used gravel roads to give way.

The Jocassee road system was initially installed and built by logging companies for the purpose of extracting timber. Logging companies only needed those roads to remain intact for a few years to sustain timber harvests. The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) is working to make those roads last for decades, and it’s a daunting task, according to Hall.

Hall will secure the expertise of SCDNR engineers to develop plans to repair the landslide sites. He expects to solicit bids from contractors to implement repairs. The repair work will require equipment and resources not available with the limited Jocassee Gorges staff. Hall hopes the repairs can be made by Fall 2019.

Editor’s Note: A 3-mile section of Horsepasture Road is currently closed from Bootleg Road south toward Jocassee Dam due to a landslide. For latest information on Jocassee roads, visit <https://www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/ManagedLand/ManagedLand/53>.

Clemson study to aid ecosystem restoration through Duke Energy's habitat program

Largest award ever is granted to Clemson study to look at Jocassee wildlife habitat, healthy forests

Most of the Jocassee Gorges was purchased by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) in 1998. In 2002, Mark Hall assumed the reins at Jocassee as project manager. Hall's first key task, as a S.C. Registered Forester, was to develop a Forest Management Plan for Jocassee. It took more than two years for Hall to assemble a plan as he sought input from several non-governmental groups, as well as professionals in the natural resource arena. Putting together the pieces of the puzzle for more than 32,000 acres was a challenge, and he recognized there would be room for improvement down the road.

Over the span of the last 18 years, a number of studies on Jocassee have rendered considerable ecological and resource inventory data. Hall decided to collaborate with Clemson University Forestry Professor Don Hagan to discuss opportunities to analyze existing data to formulate a comprehensive "roadmap" toward the systematic restoration of the plant communities on Jocassee. Hagan had developed ecological restoration plans in other areas, especially in South America, where human impacts had altered significant landscapes. There was one considerable stumbling block in creating this roadmap—a lack of

funding. Such an enterprise would be expensive. Hall and Hagan solicited funds from the Keowee-Toxaway Habitat Enhancement Program (HEP) administered by Duke Energy. The HEP permits funding for wildlife habitat restoration within the boundaries of the Keowee-Toxaway watershed. It was

one outcome of a nearly decade-long negotiation process where Duke Energy secured its licenses to operate both Lakes Keowee and Jocassee. Dr. Patrick McMillan, Clemson's renowned ecologist, assisted in the promotion of the study and the HEP funding committee responded favorably to the request for a three-year, in-depth study to guide SCDNR on the future use of fire and forest management on Jocassee. The committee granted more than \$125,000 for the project, the largest HEP grant awarded to date.

Hagan

and his graduate students will conduct more detailed resource inventory on Jocassee to complement existing data. They will help Hall evaluate the controlled burning program on Jocassee, which is designed to restore fire-adapted plant communities. Hagan and his students will coordinate with Hall on the impact of past fires and help develop strategies for burn sites, burn timing, and other forest management activities.

"Dr. Hagan's output will tell us where we are and guide us on where we need to go, in terms of wildlife habitat and healthy forests," said Pat Cloninger, SCDNR regional wildlife coordinator. "This will give us specific, science-based guidance on ecosystem health and management." ❁



A \$125,000 grant from Duke Energy's Habitat Enhancement Program will fund a study by Clemson University on Jocassee Gorges wildlife and healthy forests. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)





Camp Cedar Creek is a new group camp that recently opened at Keowee-Toxaway State Park. The park was developed by Duke Energy to meet requirements for its federal relicensing of the Keowee-Toxaway Project.

Duke Energy, SCPRT open Camp Cedar Creek at Keowee-Toxaway

New camp designed for groups seeking an outdoor adventure experience.

A new lakeside recreational facility recently opened in South Carolina's mountain country, providing another venue for boating, fishing, hiking, and camping in some of the state's best natural settings.

Camp Cedar Creek, located at Keowee-Toxaway State Park, is a 13-acre lakeside facility developed by Duke Energy to meet requirements for its federal relicensing. The new camp is designed for groups, especially those seeking an outdoor adventure experience.

The camp features 10 tent-camping sites, three camping cabins, a bathhouse, a park lodge facility, two picnic shelters, a small fishing pier, and a portage trail to Lake Keowee. Like group camps at other state parks, Camp Cedar Creek will be available for rent as a whole unit.

"We value our ongoing partnership with Duke Energy, which has gone to extraordinary lengths to provide outstanding recreational opportunities in several state parks," said Duane Parrish, director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT). "Partnerships like this help us provide public access to some

of the most exceptional venues in South Carolina, and we're a better Park Service for it."

In addition to Camp Cedar Creek, another recent facility Duke Energy built for state parks is a canoe launch at Landsford Canal State Park in York County. The utility also developed Devils Fork State Park on Lake Jocassee in 1990.

"This project was conceived in 2013 as part of our multi-year federal stakeholder relicensing process for the Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project, and a key benefit of the new license are improvements to existing public recreation access areas on Lake Jocassee and Lake Keowee, as well as development of new recreation-related facilities, like Camp Cedar Creek," said Kodwo Ghartey-Tagoe, Duke Energy's state president in South Carolina. "Our ongoing partnership with PRT makes sure projects like this help future generations enjoy the immeasurable benefits of the nature around us."

Under the new Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) license requirements, Duke Energy submitted a recreation management plan to FERC in November 2016. The plan's approval in August 2017 allowed Duke Energy and SCPRT to collaborate on project planning and construction of Camp Cedar Creek. It took two years to complete the project, at a cost of \$5.4 million. ❄️



New Palmetto Trail section accesses Carolina hemlocks

Carolina Hemlock Loop trail dedicated to the memory of conservationist John S. Rainey

A new section of the Palmetto Trail will take hikers to an incredible stand of native Carolina hemlocks in the Jocassee Gorges. Carolina hemlock is an uncommon species of tree found only in the southern Appalachians.

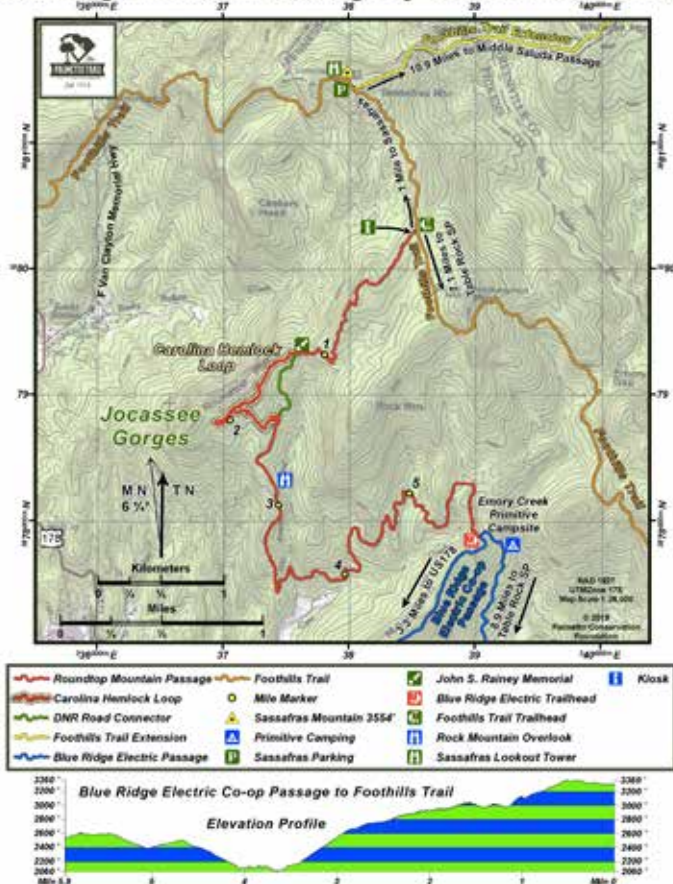
The new Carolina Hemlock Loop is dedicated to the memory of John S. Rainey (1941–2015), a prominent South Carolina attorney, conservationist and philanthropist. His photo and biography are featured on a memorial plaque on the trail leading to the hemlocks along the summit of Roundtop Mountain. The loop trail is a gift from Rainey's children.

Access to Carolina Hemlock Loop is via Roundtop Mountain Passage of the Palmetto Trail, which intersects the Foothills Trail a mile down from Sassafras Mountain toward Table Rock State Park. At 3,553 feet, Sassafras is the highest point in South Carolina. The trip from Sassafras, around the Loop, and back to Sassafras is about six miles, plus



Carolina hemlocks grow high atop Roundtop Mountain in Jocassee Gorges. A new loop on the Palmetto Trail makes access easier to these beautiful trees. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Roundtop Mountain Passage of the Palmetto Trail



the up and down of an 800-foot elevation change. A trail map and information are available at www.palmettoconservation.org.

Palmetto Conservation Foundation worked closely with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) and the Palmetto Conservation Corps to build the loop trail and provide public access to the rare grove. SCDNR is actively protecting Carolina and Eastern hemlocks on Roundtop Mountain from the Hemlock wooly adelgid, a voracious non-native insect.



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Storm takes out Palmetto Trail bridges on Eastatoe Passage

New trail section gives hikers, anglers improved access to Eastatoe Creek

A massive storm that felled trees and caused a flash flood down Eastatoe Creek on Friday, April 19, took out two pedestrian bridges on the Palmetto Trail's Eastatoe Passage.

Staff from Palmetto Conservation Foundation, Benchmark Trails and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) have assessed the damage and discussed next steps for repairs. Palmetto Conservation is hosting

a special fundraising campaign to cover the costs. Local officials estimated that the storm dumped

between eight and 10 inches of rain into the region in just a few hours' time.

Eastatoe Passage opened in Fall 2018 and connected Keowee-Toxaway State Park to the Dug Mountain Angler Access Area on Roy F. Jones Highway in the Jocassee Gorges region of northern Pickens County.

One of the bridges that was damaged in the flood—a 70-foot structure over the Eastatoe—was the longest fiberglass pedestrian bridge on the 500-mile Palmetto Trail.



A massive storm caused a flash flood down Eastatoe Creek and took out two pedestrian bridges on the Palmetto Trail's recently opened Eastatoe Passage. (SCDNR photo by Parker Sharpe)